

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 IO-13 EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00 OMB-01 AID-05

DHA-05 /089 W

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R 241417Z AUG 77

FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0504

INFO AMEMBASSY DARESSALAAM

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY MASERU POUCH

AMEMBASSY MBABANE POUCH

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, BC

SUBJECT: CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING SECRETARY CABINET STEENKAMP

REF: GABORONE 1908

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: BITTER PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE OVER OPPOSITION LEADER MATANTE'S MOTION DEPLORING ADMINISTRATION AND PRACTICES OF SECRETARY TO CABINET STEENKAMP BEGAN AUGUST 19 AND IS CONTINUING WITH VOTE EXPECTED AUGUST 26. ALTHOUGH GOVERNMENT MINISTERS HAVE CLOSED RANKS IN EFFORT TO DEFEAT THE MOTION, IT IS EVIDENT THAT STEENKAMP IS A SOURCE OF CONTROVERSY WITHIN THE GOB. END SUMMARY.

2. AUGUST 19 PARLIAMENTARY SESSION FEATURED FOUR-HOUR DEBATE ON OPPOSITION MOTION TABLED BY P.G. MATANTE THAT THE NATIONAL
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ASSEMBLY "DPLORE THE ADMINISTRATION AND PRACTICES" OF THE HEAD OF THE BOTSWANA CIVIL SERVICE (I.E., STEENKAMP). MARSHALLING HIS CONSIDERABLE ORATORICAL GIFTS TO THE FULLEST, MATANTE ACCUSED STEENKAMP, BY NAME, OF (A) UNBOUNDED AND ARBITRARY INTERVENTION IN ALL SPHERES OF PUBLIC LIFE TO INCLUDE THE CIVIL SERVICE, COURTS AND ARMY; (B) OF RETARDING LOCALIZATION BY RESERVING BEST

JOBS FOR EXPATRIATES; (C) OF HAVING NO REAL LOVE FOR BOTSWANA, A CHARGE ATTRIBUTED TO STEENKAMP'S KENYAN BIRTH, FREQUENT TRIPS TO SOUTH AFRICA, AND HIS INABILITY AFTER MANY YEARS TO SPEAK SETSWANA (WHAT OTHER BLACK NATION HAS A WHITE MAN IN SUCH A HIGH POSITION, MATANTE ASKED); (D) MATANTE CHARGED THAT BEHAVIOR OF STEENKAMP HAD CAUSED DEEP DIVISION AND COMMOTION IN THE GOVERNMENT.

3. MATANTE WAS JOINED BY THE OTHER BOTSWANA PEOPLE'S PARTY REPRESENTATIVE AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF BOTH THE BOTSWANA INDEPENDENT PARTY AND THE BOTSWANA NATIONAL FRONT. THE LATTER BROUGHT UP THE MATTER OF REGISTRAR PEPPER'S DISMISSAL AND THE MISSING BOTSWANA NATIONAL AIRWAYS FUNDS (REFTTEL). HE CLAIMED THAT PEPPER'S DISMISSAL HAD CAUSED A DEEP RIFT IN THE CABINET. (INCIDENTALLY, THE BNF REP PUT THE AMOUNT AT RAND 14,000 INSTEAD OF RAND 400,000 AS THE RUMORS HAVE IT.)

4. CLOSING POLITICAL RANKS, GOB MINISTERS VIGOROUSLY SPOKE AGAINST MATANTE'S MOTION BY POINTING OUT (A) THE POWERS ASCRIBED TO STEENKAMP BY MATANTE WERE CONSTITUTIONAL AND NOT EXCESSIVE; (B) STEENKAMP'S FOREIGN BIRTH WAS IRRELEVANT IN AS MUCH AS ALL BOTSWANA, WHETHER CITIZENS BY BIRTH, REGISTRATION OR NATURALIZATION, HAD EQUAL RIGHTS (HE IS A NATURALIZED BOTSWANA); (C) OPPOSITION'S CHARGES WERE RACIST AND REMINISCENT OF IAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SMITH/JAN VORSTER ATTITUDES; (D) CHARGES OF CORRUPTION WERE TOTALLY UNSUBSTANTIATED; (E) OF NUMEROUS ARBITRARY CIVIL SERVICE FIRINGS ATTRIBUTED TO STEENKAMP, NOT ONE OF THE PARTIES INVOLVED HAD SOUGHT REDRESS THROUGH EITHER THE BUREAUCRATIC OR JUDICIAL CHANNELS OF APPEAL.

5. ON SECOND DAY OF DEBATE, AUGUST 22, PUBLIC INFORMATION MINISTER KWELAGOBÉ UNDERTOOK LENGTHY POINT-BY-POINT REFUTATION OF OPPOSITION CHARGES. WHEN HE CAME TO THE PEPPER AFFAIR, HOWEVER, MINISTER MMUSI, WHO WAS PRESENT FOR THE SECOND DAY, ASKED THAT THE MATTER NOT BE OPENED UP IN A PUBLIC FORUM. KWELAGOBÉ AGREED ON THE CONDITION THAT MATANTE NOT REFER TO PEPPER IN HIS CLOSING ARGUMENT. THE DEBATE IS SCHEDULED TO CONCLUDE ON AUGUST 26.

6. COMMENT: AT THIS POINT IT IS CLEAR THAT MATANTE'S CHARGES HAVE TOUCHED SENSITIVE POINTS WITHIN THE GOB, ONE OF THE MOST SENSITIVE BEING STEENKAMP HIMSELF. OBSERVERS HAVE NOTED, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT NOT ONE OF THE MINISTERS WHO SPOKE AGAINST THE MOTION HAS HAD ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY TO SAY ABOUT STEENKAMP. VICE PRESIDENT/MINFIN MASIRE SAID THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES

WERE NOT ACTING BECAUSE "STEENKAMP IS ANY KIND OF AN ANGEL" BUT TO PUT DOWN THE OPPOSITION MOTION WHICH WAS UNFOUNDED, RACIST AND DIVISIVE. HEALTH MINISTER MMUSI, THE INJURED PARTY IN STEENKAMP'S FIRING OF PEPPER (REFTTEL), NOT ONLY FAILED TO JOIN THE OTHERS IN DEFENDING STEENKAMP BUT DID NOT EVEN SHOW UP FOR THE OPENING DEBATE. EXTAFF MINISTER MOGWE, IN HIS REPLY, CONCEDED THAT "COMMOTION" DID EXIST IN THE CABINET AND THAT MATANTE'S MOTION DID NOT GIVE THE CABINET AND GOVERNMENT A CHANCE TO SORT THINGS OUT.

7. BOTH HOUSE SPEAKER LOCK AND ATTORNEY GENERAL'S CHAMBERS REP JONES TOLD EMBOFF THEY CONSIDERED 90 PERCENT OF MATANTE'S OPENING ATTACK CRIMINALLY LIBELOUS. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INDEED, MATANTE UNDERMINED HIS OWN CREDIBILITY WITH UNSUPPORTED ACCUSATIONS AND FREQUENT WILD STATEMENTS, E.G. HE SAID "EVEN EUROPEAN JEWS WERE NOT AS FRUSTRATED BY HITLER AS WERE BOTSWANA'S CIVIL SERVANTS BY PHILIP STEENKAMP". IN FACT MATANTE WAS CLEARLY NOT SPEAKING TO HIS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY COLLEAGUES, BUT TO THE PREJUDICES OF THE MAN IN THE STREET. FRONT PAGE DAILY NEWS OF AUGUST 23 HEADLINED THE DEBATE IN ARTICLE WHICH, UNFORTUNATELY, GAVE WIDE COVERAGE TO MATANTE'S CHARGES AND LITTLE SPACE TO MINISTERS' REBUTTAL, THUS LEAVING IMPRESSION CHARGES WERE CREDIBLE. THE KEY QUESTION IS DEGREE TO WHICH DEBATE OVER STEENKAMP IS REALLY AIMED AT (A) WHITE AND (B) EXPATRIATES EMPLOYED BY GOB -- A QUESTION THAT COULD HAVE A BEARING, FOR EXAMPLE, ON OUR RECOMMENDATIONS ON U.S. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE. WE WILL RETURN TO THIS POINT WHEN THE IMPACT OF THE DEBATE HAS BEEN ABSORBED. NORLAND

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